

Reflective Practice in Teacher Education Programs at a HBCU

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One of the major outcomes of the educational reform movement in the United States during the past decade has been the increased focus on the professional preparation of educators (Darling-Hammond, 1997). According to Sanders and Rivers, numerous studies indicate that educators make a significant difference in their students' education (1996). In response to the incessant calls to improve and assure educator quality, the education programs at Albany State University adopted a conceptual framework that integrates state, national, and professional standards into its education preparation programs. As such a standards-based preparation approach was developed to empower future professional educators who graduate from Albany State University.

The conceptual framework at Albany State University consists of multiple forms of knowledge, drawn from many disciplines and sources, including research,

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best practices, historical and cultural perspectives, the learning community of education practitioners and professional and community values. One tenet of the conceptual framework is the goal of a reflective transformative practitioner. This principle is based on the assumption that the knowledge that supports our program is dynamic and continues to evolve as inquiry and research about teaching and learning are established.

The evolution of reflection in teaching and teacher education can be traced back to John Dewey who used the idea of the scientific method to scaffold how people think and learn. Dewey made a tremendous impact on education and how teachers use reflection in order to increase their personal and professional experiences. He defined reflection as “turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive consideration, thereby enabling us to act in a deliberate and intentional fashion. Reflection involves active, persistent and careful consideration” (Dewey as cited in Sweigard, 2007).

Since the inception of Dewey’s laboratory schools, reflection has become a major component for programs that prepare educators. Reflection can be a rich source of continued personal and professional growth. This provides an opportunity for professionals to renew and revive their practice. Educators gain information about their teaching from their own observations of themselves, coupled with their own reflections (Paulson & Kenneth cited in Sweigard, 2007). Reflection is a gift professionals can use to grow from experiences. Through reflection, professionals develop context specific theories that further their own understanding of their work and generate knowledge to inform future practice. When an educator engages in meaningful reflection, conclusions can be drawn that provide insight for future instruction. The primary emphasis is to prepare educators to create learning environments that are conducive to the teaching and learning process which will positively impact student achievement.

In order to become a reflective transformative practitioner, one must first understand what a reflective practitioner is and what transformation means. A transformative leader engages in reflection and action. Therefore in order for an educator to become a transformative leader, they must first learn the important skill of reflection. The next section of this article will describe the concept of reflection and the concept of transformation independently. These independent definitions will provide a foundation for the combination of the two concepts that are used in the teacher preparation program at Albany State University.

What Is a Reflective Practitioner?

In general, reflection uses the past to inform our judgment, reflect on our experiences and face new encounters with a broader repertoire of information, skills and techniques (Killion, Joellen, Todnem, & Guy, 1991). When you reflect on what has occurred and consequently change your actions you will hopefully experience a different outcome. There are numerous theorists who address how reflection is used in education. One theorist, Donald Schon, describes two different types of

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reflection: *Reflection-on-Action* and *Reflection-in-Action*. Reflection-on-Action occurs when a teacher reflects on their daily lessons and classroom actions and uses the information gathered to adjust their lessons/teaching (Killion, Joellen, Todnem, & Guy, 1991). The goal of this form of reflection is for educators to become more effective and conscientious teachers. This type of reflection is reflecting back on lessons that have been taught and is a skill that teachers need to acquire in their early teaching experiences.

The second type of reflection that Schon describes is Reflection-in-Action. This type of reflection occurs during teaching and involves acting immediately to improve or better your teaching. Paulson and Kenneth describe the difference between these two types of reflection; if a teacher thinks reflectively about an episode of teaching after class, he or she engages in reflecting-on-action. In contrast, if they think about the episode while in the midst of teaching, then reflection-in-action takes place (Paulson & Kenneth as cited in Sweigard, 2007).

Schon's reflection theory has been used as a foundation for several researchers. Killion, Joellen, Todnem, and Guy (1991) used Schon's two types of reflection (reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action) and added a third type (reflection-for-action). Reflection-for-action is stated as the desired outcome of Schon's reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. This type of reflection looks at what has occurred in the past and how this can help change our teaching process in the future. Consequently this will provide students with an enriched learning environment. An example of reflection-for-action in the classroom is when a teacher critiques events from the past and makes a conclusion or judgment that that will impact future teachings/lessons.

Valli (1997) states that there are six components of a teacher's knowledge that guide how they teach: *behavioral, technical, reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, deliberative, personalistic*, and *critical*. All of these (except behavioral) involve the concept of reflection. The behavioral approach involves skills acquisition and assessment by education faculty and cooperating teachers. The assessment will indicate what behaviors the student needs to address. The five other ways incorporate the concept of reflection which is an expansion of Schon's original concepts. The first, technical reflection, involves the teacher candidate's reflection of their own performance and exhibits internal motivation to better themselves. Reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are the second ways that Valli identifies and they have previously been described. The third type of reflection, deliberative reflection, involves the consolidation of several sources of information from a variety of perceived experts as the teacher makes decisions about practice (Killion, Joellen, Todnem, & Guy, 1991). Personalistic reflection requires the teacher to draw links between their professional and personal life. In essence, how does being a teacher fulfill their personal life goals (Killion, Joellen, Todnem, & Guy, 1991). The final type of reflection is critical reflection and it goes beyond the person and looks at the institution and political aspects of education and social injustices.

Eby and Kujawa (1998) describe six characteristics of the reflective practitioner:

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- Reflective practitioners are active—they search energetically for information and solutions to problems that arise in the classroom.
- Reflective practitioners are persistent—they are committed to thinking through difficult issues in depth and continuing to consider matters even though it may be difficult or tiring.
- Reflective practitioners are careful—they are concerned for self and other, respecting students as human beings and trying to create a positive, nurturing classroom.
- Reflective practitioners are skeptical—they realize that there are few absolutes and maintain a healthy skepticism about educational theories and practices.
- Reflective practitioners are rational—they demand evidence and apply criteria in formulating judgments rather than blindly following trends or acting on impulse.
- Reflective practitioners are proactive—they are able to translate reflective thinking into positive action.

Ebby and Kujawa (1998) also came up with six important traits that a reflective practitioner should practice: (a) Understand the process of reflection-on-action; (b) Go beyond mere description of lessons (the what?); (c) Learn about reflection through interaction with teacher educators, cooperating teachers and fellow pre-service educators (through journal buddy reading); (d) Learn to reflect on learners and the learning processes as well as the content; (e) Learn to integrate ideas from others and experiences to improve teaching; and (f) Understand that reflective practitioners are active, persistent, careful, skeptical, rational and proactive.

One way these six traits can be accomplished or developed is through the process of reflective journal writing. The literature clearly states that reflective journal writing for student teachers/students undertaking their field work experience is a key component to becoming a skillful reflective practitioner. Journal writing needs to go beyond just describing a room setup or talking about the different students in the room. Davis (2006) describes the difference between productive and unproductive reflection. Unproductive reflection is mainly descriptive without very much analysis, usually listing ideas rather than connecting ideas. Productive reflection is likely to promote effective learning and involves questioning assumptions and seeing things in a variety of different ways. A reflective journal needs to address the daily lesson and activities; what happened, what changes could be made, how you could improve the lesson, any questions or issues that occurred in the classroom and how you addressed them or how you could have addressed them.

In essence, one must go beyond just describing the lesson and include an analysis of what could have been done differently, making connections with other experiences and understanding how to interpret a teaching idea. Sweigard (2007)

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states that teachers gain information about their teaching from their own observations of themselves coupled with their reflections. Therefore a reflective journal is a logical first step in assisting a teacher candidate in progressing into an exemplary future teacher.

Teacher educators must take a stake in ensuring that their teacher candidates have the means and opportunity to develop the valuable skill of reflection. Along with requiring reflective journal writing as a part of the assessment of student teachers, teacher educators must also model how reflection-on-action and reflection-for-action work. Teacher educators can be assisted in this endeavor by incorporating action research into their courses. This type of research involves the same cycles of plan, act, observe and reflect that reflection does (Liston & Zeichner, 1990).

Teacher as a researcher is often used synonymously with action research. Although differences exist between these two paradigms regarding the type and level of resulting action, they are similar in that teachers perform research about themselves, their students, classrooms, administration, parents and community for the sole purpose to improve teaching, learning and the institution (Del Carlo, Hinkhouse, & Isbell, 2010). This concept can be used to incorporate an assessment/action research component into the student teaching experience. Where student teachers are the researchers in which they research and reflect on their daily lessons/teachings.

The critical role that the teacher educator or cooperating teacher plays is to assist student teachers to be successful in engaging in reflective practices. Nolan and Huber (1989) state that the aims of supervision (teacher educator) are: (1) engaging the teacher in the process of reflective behavior while (2) fostering critical inquiry into the process of teaching and learning, thereby (3) increasing the teachers understanding of teaching practice and (4) broadening and deepening the repertoire of images and metaphors the teacher can utilize to deal with problems. By incorporating students' reflections with their own reflections and considering the stable data provided by the participant-observer, teachers were able to better understand classroom events (Nolan & Huber, 1989).

There are numerous positive outcomes that teachers can see when they engage in reflection; increase in their teaching and lesson planning, increase in self-esteem, have greater control of their teaching practice, greater belief that they can influence student learning, greater interest in gathering data and information on their teaching and an increase in encouraging their students to engage in critical thinking practices. Cruickshank and Applegate (1981) state the following; reflective teaching gives students time to think carefully about their own teaching behaviors and an opportunity to view other experiences of professionals in action. Teachers find themselves engaged in a meaningful process of inquiry which leads them toward renewed self-esteem and interest in teaching. As a result, teachers become more reflective about teaching and more interested in self-improvement. Reflective teaching is an opportunity for meaningful teacher growth.

What is a Transformative Practitioner?

Reflection is at the root of becoming a transformative leader. Through research opportunities, readings, reflection, dialogue and collaboration, teachers explore new ideas and different perspectives, addressing fundamental epistemological, cultural and developmental issues. As they study, reflect, and discuss challenges in their own classrooms, and explore their role as professional, teachers gain new perspectives on teaching and student learning that lead them to make critical changes in their classrooms (DeMulder, Cricchi, & Sockett, 2001). The second aspect of defining a transformative reflective practitioner is to understand what a transformative leader is. Transformative leadership has been described by Freire (1991) as a continuous loop of reflection and action. Teachers who put this into practice not only become transformative leaders and master the skill of reflection, but also earn the trust, respect and praise of their students and peers. A transformative leader in the classroom (teacher) can transform their classroom into a democratic and empowering learning space through engaging in critical reflection, dialogue and collaboration (View, DeMulder, Kayler, & Stribling, 2009).

Becoming a transformative leader and reflective practitioner is not something that happens overnight. Teacher candidates should be taught these skills during their coursework and then refine and adapt them in their own professional practice. Transformative leadership is not wielding authority, but rather is about empowering students to be active participants in a democracy. This teacher's classroom becomes a space that embraces critical inquiry, creativity, imagination, and collaboration (View, Demulder, Kayler, & Stribling, 2009). In essence, the teachers are creating an environment that not only empowers students to take their own learning into their hands, but also gives them the opportunity and skills to interact with other students and the larger community in order to create an environment that stimulates learning. Transformative teachers are reflective practitioners that are constantly developing new ways of teaching and learning and consequently passing these skills and behaviors to their students in order to better their learning opportunities.

Methods and Purpose

The College of Education faculty at Albany State University sought to improve the components of its Conceptual Framework. Thus, researchers conducted a systematic literature review of one component—the reflective practitioner. The researchers recognized that simply providing opportunities for teacher candidates to reflect would be insufficient and unproductive. Consequently, one of the college's critical goals was to produce teachers who could balance content knowledge with transforming decisions.

The researchers explored the literature on reflective-transformative practitioners to confirm the college's former conceptual framework and to add evidence-based weight to a revised Conceptual Framework. Utilizing a basic

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research methodology of discovery and interpretation, the researchers sought to find trends in the literature that may apply to the college's teacher candidates. In addition, the researchers anticipated that a thorough literature review would reveal attitudinal and behavioral responses of reflective practices similar to those of the college's teacher candidates. Thus, the literature review would provide insightful knowledge to guide the development of theories used to revise one component of the college's conceptual framework.

The authors sought to highlight the inherent connection between reflective teaching and transformative events. Because public schools are mirror images of the society, a nation looks to its educational system to define and solve its problems. For this reason, teachers must be purposeful, reflective practitioners who are equipped to transform societal ills through educating the masses. This is the ultimate goal for not only the teacher preparation program at Albany State University, but all teacher preparation programs.

Applications of Reflective Transformative Practice at Albany State University

Albany State University's College of Education has formulated five unit standards for its' conceptual framework that address the characteristics of a reflective transformative practitioner:

1. Demonstrates understanding and the ability to select, construct, and use various types of formal and informal assessment instruments, and make instructional decisions about student learning and development.
2. Demonstrates understanding and the ability to communicate students' progress to other professionals and parents.
3. Demonstrates understanding and the ability to apply National, State, University/College, and professional standards to positively impact student learning.
4. Demonstrates understanding and the ability to reflect on professional practices, develop a plan for professional growth, and implement that plan.
5. Demonstrates understanding and the ability to construct research-based inquiry and use the findings to positively impact student learning.

Initially, John Dewey's definition of the reflective process became the catalyst for collaborative discussions in structuring descriptors for the unit's reflective transformative practitioner. Dewey defined reflection as "Turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious consideration, thereby enabling us to act in a deliberate and intentional fashion. Reflection involves active, persistent and careful consideration" (Dewey as cited by Sweigard, 2007, p. 1). Thus, the unit's descriptors include all aspects of the complex activities and demands of the teaching and learning process. Standards 1 and 4 began to emerge from this thought. In addition, the descriptors must encompass a systematic means to judge 'consecutive consideration' in order

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‘to act in a deliberate and intentional fashion.’ Standards two, three, and five follow Dewey’s definition of reflection.

Second, the work of Paulo Freire (1993) influenced the development of the unit’s standards for the reflective transformative practitioner. Freire (1993) emphasized that education was a dialogue that involved respect—not one person acting on another, but rather people working collaboratively. Dialogue was more than deepening understanding, it led in part, to making a difference in the world (Smith, 2002). Freire’s theoretical description of praxis (a continuous loop of reflection and action) was action based on reflection with certain inherent qualities. These included commitment to human well-being, the search for truth, and respect for others. It would always be risky, requiring wise and prudent practical judgment about how to act in this situation (Smith, 1999).

To support transformative practices, the unit’s programs include collaborative teaching and learning processes, performance-based field and clinical experiences, reflection, content-knowledge mastery, instructional technology, cultural sensitivity, peer analysis, and accountability (Lu & Ortlieb, 2009). The unit promotes habits of the mind that epitomize democratic dispositions to positively impact student learning, to empower a community of learners, and to exact needed changes for *this* society.

Third, the contributions of Schon (1983) shaped the connection between the unit’s reflective transformative standards and individual program’s theories and practices. As previously stated, Schon contributed two types of reflection to the education field. An educator must develop both skills so that their theoretical knowledge will merge with practical applications. In addition, a third type of reflection, reflection for action. This will become the ultimate aim for the previous types of reflection and a way to guide future and more practical purposes. The university faculty considered Valli’s personalistic reflection and critical reflection when designing the unit’s standards for reflective transformative practitioner (1997).

The personalistic reflection would compel practitioners to examine their own personal identities and the impact this would have on the personal lives of their students. Valli (1997) argued that this type of reflection addressed the Eurocentric backgrounds of many practitioners assigned to educate a diverse population of students. Similarly, critical reflections entailed the social, moral, and political components of education as an institution. This type of reflection would scrutinize social injustices and the resolution of said injustices (Del Carlo, Hinkhouse, & Isbell, 2009).

Thus, the cognitive and affective aspects of reflecting persuaded the unit’s reflective transformative statements. The statements would oblige practitioners to perform deliberate and careful judgments about their own personal growth and their relationships with students. Practitioners would be duty-bound to examine their skills to guide reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Finally, the unit’s statements provide a balance to encourage practitioners to exercise reflection-for-action.

As the university faculty made program decisions about in-class and out-of-class assignments, we recognized simply providing opportunities to reflect would be inadequate because reflection may not be productive. Thus, programs within

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the unit structured course-specific tasks to be completed during field and clinical experiences. These level-specific tasks would enhance pre-service and in-service teachers' progression towards balancing context knowledge with disciplined judgment for teaching, learning, and problem-solving (Minott, 2010). Likewise, in-class assignments, such as lesson demonstrations, collaborative inquiry projects, and peer evaluations, were designed to promote an analytical approach to reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Moreover, the university faculty focused on the affective aspects of a reflective practitioner.

Reflection is the impetus of a reflective transformative practitioner. Reflection requires constant and continual classroom observation, evaluation, and subsequent action. When becoming an effective teacher it's imperative to understand the "why's", "how's" and "what if's" of the teaching-learning process. This understanding is garnered through the consistent practice of reflection, as well as learning through experiences.

To strengthen relations with partner schools, candidates should be placed in schools in large numbers during field experiences and student teaching. Candidates placed in partner schools in adequate numbers should be able to exact change during the reflective transformative transition beginning with initial field observations and culminating with student teaching. The following are some examples of activities that promote reflection and engage candidates in the reflective process which include: interviews, reflective journaling, lesson plans, instruction tools, videotaped lessons, professional portfolios, skill mastery projects, simulations/ role playing, and action research.

Interviews

As part of the application admission to teacher education, all students were interviewed by the chair of teacher education. There were specific questions asked and rated during the interview. The score on the interview suggested the student's ability for success in the department. The interview was designed to help them reflect on their needs and experiences as they matriculated through the program. This was also an opportunity to review Georgia Assessment Certification Examination (GACE) with students. Suggestions from the chair of the department were provided on the best strategies for preparing to successfully passing the GACE Content Test.

Reflective Journaling

The reflective journal process is initiated during the first educational class. The reflective journal culminates in the final course, student teaching. Students/candidates also reflect on different experiences during all field experiences. Students/candidates are required to record activities, thoughts, observations, feelings, incidents and questions in their journals. The reflective journal can be used to describe situations/events, and what they learned from various experiences. Students/candidates are expected to enhance observational and communication skills, explore feelings,

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and assess progress. The journaling process should denote growth over time as the student/candidates matriculate through the teacher education program.

Lesson Plans

Candidates complete lesson plans in all method courses. All lesson plans must follow the guide lines set forth by the department. The lesson plan should include a variety of instructional strategies supported by research to improve teaching and learning. Candidates will be able to reflect on the effectiveness of the lesson.

Instruction Tools

Candidates are required to develop instruction tools to enhance prek-12 learning. Candidates must select a subject/specific skill and design an instruction tool to teach skills to young children. Candidates will utilize the instructional tool during field experiences/student teaching. Candidates will reflect on how students interacted with the tool to determine the tool's effectiveness.

Videotaped Lessons

Candidates are asked to video tape themselves teaching a lesson. This can be in the classroom or a simulation. The candidates view and listen to the tape for the purpose of analyzing instruction and students' responses. The candidates can also review questioning strategies and monitor wait time and transitions. The candidates can determine what was done well in the lesson and what should change. This reflection component could guide reteaching the lesson.

Professional Portfolio

The professional portfolio is initiated during the initial education courses. The professional portfolio culminates in the student teaching course. Specific artifacts are assigned to each class. Students/ candidates complete the assignments for inclusion in the portfolio. The process of creating and selecting artifacts for inclusion in the portfolio requires significant reflective thinking about one's self as a teacher and growth over time. The portfolio should be aligned with INTASC (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium) and GPS (Georgia Professional Standards) and performance standards for student teaching.

Skill Mastery Projects

The skill mastery project is a component of the portfolio fulfilled during the student teaching course. Candidates are required to select a subject and specific skill in the class in which they are instructing. The candidates will develop and administer a pretest. The candidate will teach the skill using various instructional strategies. The candidates will then develop and administer a posttest. The candidates will complete a color coded bar graph depicting the pretest and posttest scores. This chart should show if students took students from not knowing to knowing the skill. Candidates can reflect on what was done effectively and was done ineffectively.

Simulations/Role Playing

Simulations can be used to provide a fertile learning environment for students. Candidates simulate an activity that is *real*. They simulate the activity so well there is little difference between the simulated environment and the real one, and the same kind of learning experience can take place. Simulations are *hands on* involving students so they become participants. Students learn better from their own experiences than having others' experiences related to them.

Action Research

Candidates are required to identify a situation/problem noted in their classroom. Candidates utilize all of the components of action research to solve the problem. Once data is collected, data is used to provide information about what can be done to improve student learning and teacher performance.

Conclusion

Incorporating the concept of reflection into teacher education programs, prepares teachers for a lifetime of reflecting on best practices that impact student achievement. As the authors have stated, there are various ways in which reflection can be incorporated into teacher preparation programs. Each unique class and program should decide which method of reflection works best with the course concepts and objectives of. Therefore, the purpose of this research was not to rate or evaluate the methods of reflection, rather to provide examples of reflection being used in the education field and at Albany State University.

As evident by this article, the teacher education program at Albany State University incorporates reflective practices into its classes. The implications that this has for future teachers will impact their practice in actual classrooms. When students are taught to be reflective in various formats for various reasons, the hope is that this practice will continue in the teaching classroom. The implications for this practice will include greater success in student achievement and teacher practice.

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